



Uganda

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government imposed some minor restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, local authorities prevented some nighttime religious meetings for security reasons.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, a proposed Domestic Relations Bill that includes new restrictions on the practice of polygyny drew thousands of Muslims to the streets in peaceful protest during the period covered by this report.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights; it is also active in sponsoring efforts to promote dialogue and harmony among religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 93,070 square miles, and its population is approximately 26.7 million. Christians constitute approximately 85 percent of the population. Muslims comprise approximately 12 percent of the population. A variety of other religions, including traditional indigenous religions, Hinduism, the Baha'i Faith, and Judaism, are practiced freely and combined represent an estimated 2 percent of the population. Among Christian groups, the Roman Catholic Church has the largest number of followers with 42 percent; the Anglican Church claims 36 percent. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Orthodox Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baptist Church, the Unification Church, and the Pentecostal Church, among others, also are active. Muslims are mainly Sunni, although there are Shi'a followers of the Aga Khan among the Asian community. Several branches of Hinduism also are represented among the Asian community. There are few atheists.

In many areas, particularly in rural settings, some religions tend to be syncretistic. Deeply held indigenous beliefs are blended into or observed alongside the rites of other religions, particularly in areas that are predominantly Christian.

Missionary groups of several denominations are active, including the Pentecostal Church, the Baptist Church, the Church of Uganda (part of the Anglican Communion), the Church of Christ, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice, the Government imposed some minor restrictions.

All new indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious organizations, must register with the NGO Board, a division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that regulates and oversees NGO services. According to the NGO Registration Act, failure to register is a criminal offense punishable by a fine not less than \$6 (10,000 shillings) and not exceeding \$115 (200,000 shillings). Failure to pay the fine can result in imprisonment of up to a year for those managing the organization.

To register, each organization must submit the following documents to the NGO Board: a registration form for the organization signed by two promoters providing the organization's name, its objectives, the persons to whom membership is open, the membership body, titles of organization officers and their addresses, the organization's source of funding, property owned by the organization, and any privileges, immunities, or exemptions requested by the organization; a recommendation letter endorsed by the three chairmen of the local government structures and the Resident District Commissioner; two letters of recommendation by guarantors or references of the organization; a budget and plan of activities to be carried out during the first year of operation;

two copies of the organization's constitution or by-laws; an organizational chart of the leadership; and a letter specifying the district of operation.

The Government refused registration to self-proclaimed religious groups on the grounds that the groups were not legitimate religious organizations.

Missionary groups face no restrictions on their activities. Foreign missionary groups, like foreign NGOs, must register with the Government. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant registration to any foreign missionary groups.

In March, more than 3,000 Muslims protested a proposed Domestic Relations Bill. The bill would restrict polygyny by permitting it only if the husband has economic means to support additional wives equally, and if the current wives consent to follow-on marriages. The bill also maintains the legal age for marriage at 18, which conflicts with the Muslim custom of permitting marriage at an earlier age with parental consent. By the end of the reporting period, the bill was still under consideration by Parliament.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the Uganda Revenue Authority still had not implemented its decision to tax religious institutions' surplus income not put to the common use of their congregations or to the good of society. However, in June 2005, Parliament passed a law that requires religious organizations to pay taxes on any properties that earn income.

Permits are necessary for the construction of facilities, including those of a religious nature. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant such permits to any religious organization.

Private Qur'anic and Christian schools are common. In public schools, religious instruction is optional, and the curriculum covers academic study of world religions rather than instruction in one particular faith. There are also many private schools sponsored by religious groups that offer religious instruction. These schools are open to students of other faiths, but they usually do not offer minority religious instruction.

Prisoners are given the opportunity to pray on days devoted to their faith. Muslim prisoners usually are released from work duties during the month of Ramadan.

Religious holy days celebrated as national holidays include Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Some local governments have temporarily restricted operation of religious organizations for reasons of security. Local authorities in Ntungamo and Kayunga districts banned night prayers because of suspicions that people were masquerading as followers to commit crimes at night.

In March, Makerere University authorities banned evening prayers around buildings in the center of campus to prevent disruption of lectures and university office activities.

In June 2004, 76 followers of Prophetess Nabaasa Gwajwa were fined approximately \$1 (2,000 shillings) each and released from jail. The group pled guilty to charges connected to their failure to register with the Uganda Herbalists Association and protests against police actions.

The leader and members of the religious group "Jurwo Ni Mungu" (Believers in God), who were arrested in 2002 for unlawful assembly, were released from prison in June 2004 when authorities dropped the charges in the case. Their religious institution was closed at the time of their arrest for forbidding members from seeking medical treatment.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that local authorities dispersed religious meetings.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports that authorities arrested persons due to their membership in religious groups during the period covered by this report; however, in April police arrested eight people, including a minister, for inciting violence at a church service. Violence broke out among the accused when the recently transferred minister from Chanika Church of Uganda in Kisoro District insisted on presiding at the service of his former church despite his transfer.

In March 2004, armed gunmen at the Evangelical School of Technology in Yumbe District killed an American missionary couple, Donna and Warren Pett, and a Ugandan student, Isaac Juruga. Police initially arrested five persons suspected of participation in the murder. The motive for the killings is unknown but may be related to theft, local hostility to evangelical activity in a predominantly Muslim area, or a rivalry between two local clans. By the end of the reporting period, six suspects were charged with murder and were awaiting trial.

In June 2004, authorities withdrew charges and released the 12 followers of the Kitula Kebise religious group arrested for disorderly conduct in 2002.

In August 2004, eight Tabliq Muslims were arrested for attacking an evangelical Christian crusade in Masaka District and for assaulting anti-riot police. A student was shot and killed by riot police and others were injured in the riot.

The rebel organization Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), is responsible for killing tens of thousands of persons in the past 19 years, kidnapping more than 20,000 children, attacking religious leaders and property, and causing more than 1.4 million persons to flee their homes and move to makeshift camps. During the period covered by this report, the Government continued its efforts to stop the LRA insurgency through a combination of military action against the LRA, attempted negotiations for a peace settlement, and provision of amnesty for rebels wishing to surrender.

Makerere University rejected the 2003 petition by the Archbishop of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uganda, Dr. John Wani, to forbid institutions of higher learning from holding exams on days of worship. University officials argued that it would be difficult and unnecessary for a secular institution to create an exam schedule that would accommodate every religious day of worship.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

Unlike the previous year, there were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

During the period covered by this report, several religious alliances, including the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, Religious Efforts for Teso and Karamoja, and the Inter-Religious Program, continued efforts to ease religious tensions and find lasting solutions to civil unrest and the insurgency in the northern part of the country.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights; it is also active in sponsoring efforts to promote dialogue and harmony among religious groups.

During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador and other U.S. Government and Embassy officials met with leaders of various religious institutions, including representatives from the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council; the Church of Uganda; the Catholic Church; the National Fellowship of Born Again Churches of Uganda; the Baha'i Faith; the Abayudaya Jewish community; the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda; and the Uganda Joint Christian Council.

The U.S. Embassy gave grants to two Muslim organizations to organize workshops on democracy and good governance. The workshops also touched on the broader themes of religious tolerance and human rights in a diverse society.

The U.S. Embassy sponsored several events to promote interfaith dialogue, forge interfaith coalitions to support peace building in conflict areas, and allow the Muslim population to voice its opinions on issues of bilateral interest. International Visitor grants allowed influential Muslim leaders to travel to the United States, where they shared their experiences with fellow Muslims. The U.S. Government works with and through faith-based organizations to promote peace and reconciliation in conflict.

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